1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

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Above: A LEPCHA HOUSE

Below: A *MOONG LI:* A HOUSE FOR THE 'HOUSE-GOBLIN' *THYAK-DUM*, SITUATED IN A CARDAMUM FIELD; BEHIND ANOTHER HOUSE

[facing p. 60]

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

[351] 794 tree tomato bushes, chilli bushes, onions, etc. inside the monastery precincts; but for the greater part of his food he is dependent on gifts from the villagers. The holder of this office was a very old man called Pong-ring, born in 1852; he was very feeble, half blind, suffered from polyps which made him almost incomprehensible even to the Lepchas, and his body was covered with the most revolting open sores. To accommodate our staff he had been turned out of his house and was taken as a boarder by the next nearest house, the owner of which, Jiroong, could trace a very distant relationship with him. In his very old age he was abnormally pious, hardly moving without his personal prayer wheel. He had never received proper religious instruction and could not read (or go through the motions of reading); his devotions were limited to those of the uninstructed and usually illiterate nuns and a number of rather unkind jokes, considering his age and feebleness, were [868] made about his position as head of the female congregation. As an old man past his work, unable to support himself and without children, he was not respected by the other Lepchas, most of whom felt, as I did, that he would be better dead; and some of the rather heartless children used to call out to him 'Why don't you die now while the Europeans are here, so that they can see your funeral?'. He was constantly having attacks of illness, but always recovered, to my, I hope, disguised distress; he was a very unpleasant spectacle and neighbour, and I should have liked to have seen the funeral of a lama, which I was not able to do.

351 At the back of the monastery the wooded hill goes up steeply to some cultivated land and a small group of houses. To the west is a small open alp with a few fruit trees in it, and beyond that slightly rising ground, this year not cultivated, and then about half a mile or more away another group of four houses.

iii

621 The monastery is almost exactly in the middle of Lingthem. Of the 33 houses 14 are above the monastery and the rest below, 14 to the east and the rest to the west. There are five groups of four houses each, one of three, and the rest either isolated or in pairs.

● 342 Lepcha houses are rectangular buildings raised about four feet off the ground on stone piles which go round three sides of the building; the east side is left open, and the space underneath serves as a shelter at night for domestic animals. The building

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

itself is made of wood, plaster, bamboo and thatch. All buildings have their entrance to the east and face north; the north-south sides are the longest. The first portions of the building to be erected are the five upright supports, one in the centre and one at each corner; they consist of roughly shaped tree-trunks. For the erection of these supports and for the building of the stone wall an overseer is necessary; for the rest of the building no director is used. The floor is usually woven bamboo, but some of the richer people cover the bamboo with smoothed planks; the walls are always of bamboo covered with plaster, occasionally with wooden supports. Except in the Mandal's house, where there are a couple of window frames, the south and west walls are blind; the entrance, which is reached by a pair of notched logs or rough steps, is always on the east; and round the east and north side runs a balcony of plaited bamboo. The north wall is mostly open to the balcony but there are usually wooden shutters which can be closed when the nights are cold. The balcony is used a great deal; for gossiping in the daytime or during warm evenings, for a great variety of household tasks, since there is seldom much light inside the house, as a place where fowls can roost, and as a latrine for infants, invalids, the drunk or the lazy. The roof is made of reeds hung over bamboo and supported on a wooden frame; the north and south sides of the roof cover the whole space between the roof-tree and the top of the wall, but the east and west sides are somewhat inserted at a slightly lower angle, so that there is a triangle (either empty or filled with widely-woven bamboo) on the east and west sides under the roof-tree which is meant to provide ventilation and an escape for the smoke; the device is not very successful and often of an evening I was half-blinded by smoke so that I could not see across a room and the tears streamed down my face. The Lepchas are completely inured to this atmosphere and could not understand why I coughed and choked.

The great majority of Lepcha houses consist of two rooms and an attic; a few of the poorest have only one room, and a couple of the biggest houses have a third small store-room beyond the *dé-ong*. The first room on entering from the east is the *thop-song*, or, as I shall refer to it in future, the kitchen. Round the side are either slightly raised shelves or a bar set into the wooden floor, which marks the sleeping places of the members of the household. During the day the bedding and pillows are rolled up and put away in boxes and are only brought out just before retiring to sleep. Except

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

for the sleeping places of grandparents or parents-in-law, which are avoided out of respect, these sleeping places serve as seats in the daytime. In the centre of the dividing wall is the cooking place; this is a built-up square of pounded earth and clay, perhaps five feet in each direction and raised about a foot off the ground; into this while it is still soft are inserted four upright stones to support the cooking pots over the logs of wood. Above the fire-place is a drying ledge of woven bamboo hanging from the rafters. There is a very fragile ceiling of bamboo which serves as a store-house; it is entered through a trap-door which is placed nearly directly above the cooking-place so as to allow the smoke to escape and which is reached by a notched log.

The dividing wall which separates the two rooms is usually a wooden partition (occasionally bamboo) with a door, or at least a door-frame, in the side nearest the balcony. This second room is called *dé-ong*. In the houses of lamas and of the more pious laymen there is an altar against the south wall. This altar varies enormously with the wealth and inclinations of the individual; some of the most elaborate are miniature reproductions of the altars in the monastery, with large metal images and musical instruments and other decorations; and in one or two houses there are pigeon-holes on either side containing the sixteen volumes of the Boom, the shortened version of the Kangyour. In other houses the altar is no more than a wooden box set up on end, with one small metal image inside, and sometimes not even that.

The *dé-ong*, whether it is fitted up as a private lamaist temple or not, is always more or less of a ceremonial room, for in it are performed the numerous ceremonies which occur in the life of everyone, for feared or actual illness or death, or for marriage. Ordinarily the room is little used and is only slept in by lamas, and not always by them. The attitude to the *dé-ong* is similar to that held towards the parlour in lower-middle-class English homes. It is the place where distinguished visitors are received, where emotionally important events of a slightly ceremonious nature take place; it is not a room which is used by the family in ordinary everyday life. In one or two houses there is a small and narrow store-room beyond the *dé-ong*; in other houses the *dé-ong* is used for this purpose also. Heads of maize and millet are suspended from the bamboo ceiling to dry, and sacks of grain and flour are kept under the altar. People fetching stores from this place are meant to prostrate themselves three times at each visit, but usually

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

these reverences are merely sketched out. In the *dé-ong* too will be kept the chests containing spare clothes and jewels.

With the exception of the altar, and of a couple of the biggest houses (those of Tafoor and Chala Mandal) which have rough coloured frescoes on the external plaster and slightly carved doorways and windows, Lepcha houses are entirely unornamented within and without. As a generalisation it may be said that the Lepchas possess neither arts nor crafts, though they show considerable dexterity in adapting natural materials to domestic uses. Lepchas are capable of becoming very efficient craftsmen; the locally done carpentry work in the monastery is as good as could be desired; but such useless decoration is for them entirely pointless, an alien craft to be learned from aliens at the command and expense of the state. Datoop, a master carpenter, who had studied the craft for nine years and who had done the fine work in most of the monasteries of the neighbourhood, had not a single piece of carved wood in his house.

Painting is an even more alien art, confined exclusively to specially trained lamas. The only painter in the neighbourhood was the Lharibu (painter) Chujen of Panung, the father-in-law of Tafoor, and he had had to give up the practice of the craft with increasing years and failing eyesight. He started with a natural propensity for drawing, which was noted by his lamaist instructor, who advised him to learn to become a painter. He studied for nine years at the monastery of Pensong. The method of instruction was the following. The pupils were provided with a piece of oiled wood covered with black earth, on which was placed a thin layer of white powder; when this was scratched with a pointed stick a black outline drawing resulted, which could be wiped out so that the board could be used again. The teacher would draw a model and the pupils would copy that for some days, only going on to the next model when the first was copied perfectly. Thus the first five or six days were occupied with the head of the God Chum-den-dé; then nine or ten days were occupied in learning to draw this God's body naked; then the body draped; and finally the whole figure coloured. In this mechanical way a whole repertoire of sacred pictures were learned during the nine years' teaching, and the Lharibu later learned others by copying existing models.

According to the Lharibu's view of art, all pictures are approximations to a divine original, varying in merit chiefly by their nearness to this ideal, but also partly through the fineness and

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286 The weaving of cloth is, as has already been said, now almost extinct in Zongu; in Lingthem only a couple of women—the wives of Datoop and Jiroong—weave at all regularly. Lepcha cloths are extremely finely woven; nearly all are in striped patterns, sometimes over a plain, and sometimes over a patterned background. I have been shown such cloths further ornamented with needlework embroidery, but I did not see any so enhanced in Zongu. Although weaving is now almost a lost art, the spindle is considered the [562] typical feminine symbol, as the arrow is the masculine one; and in stories the heavy bar of the loom is the woman's chief weapon.

301 Although no attempt is made to add 'beauty' to the ordinary objects and surroundings of life, both men and women wear a certain amount of jewellery. The men wear turquoise ear-rings and rings, the women heavy and elaborate necklaces of big and usually unworked semi-precious stones, often with a charm-box of fretted gold or silver inlaid with turquoise and coral suspended from them, and also occasionally brooches and bracelets; but all these jewels [556] are bought ready-made. They are considered to enhance the beauty of the wearer; they are also a display of wealth and the only possible form of investment. Young people occasionally display a certain amount of coquetry in their dress, but the effect is usually unfortu- [515] nately marred for the stranger owing to the Lepchas' habit of not washing their bodies.

iv

● 342 Nowadays new houses are built very rarely. According to Chala Mandal—the head of the village of Lingthem, and also of the smaller village of Panung to the east with ten houses, and Lik-lyang (five houses) Salim and Safo (three houses each) on the other side of the Talung river—only four new houses have been built in the [592] present century. Ordinarily the members of a Lepcha household do not separate, but if the family gets too numerous, or if brothers, either real or classificatory, do not agree, the household will split and the land be divided and the younger brother will build a house of his own. Three of the four new houses—those of Ongden, Kurma and Nahyeun—were built for this reason. In the case of the fourth house—that of Katel—the situation was more complicated 342 and irregular. Katel, a man from a village on the far side of Zongu, 592 married a woman of Lingthem, an orphan who had been brought up in the Mandal's house, and took her home to his village. But

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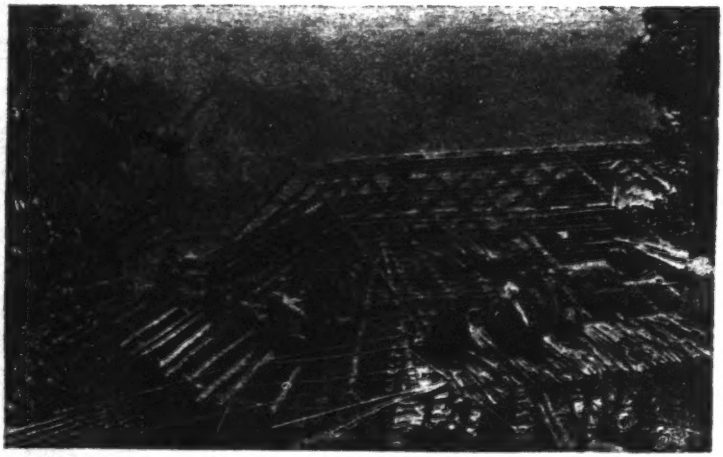

EVERYBODY HELPS WITH THE THATCHING OF PEMBU'S ROOF

[facing p. 68]

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

342 592 Mrs. Katel[7] was both unhappy and unpopular in her husband's community, and ran away for refuge to the Mandal who had brought her up. Her husband Katel followed her, and asked the Mandal's permission to settle in Lingthem; this was given and he was provided with land on which to build a house and which he could clear for cultivation. During the period when these four houses were built an equal number fell into decay either through family lines dying out, or through households amalgamating. Thus Tobgé, a young married man, all of whose family had died, had abandoned his house to go and live with Jiroong, who was his father's youngest brother.

According to the oldest inhabitants the number of houses increased very greatly in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ninety-year-old Serving, who was almost in his dotage, said that when he was a child there were only four houses in Lingthem; and Kahlyeu, born in 1860, says that in his childhood there were about twelve households. Kahlyeu ascribes the increase to the fact that in those days families were larger and split up as the sons grew older; but it seems probable that the indirect pacification after 1860 made possible a considerable increase in the number of permanently settled inhabitants.

173 According to Kahlyeu—and the tradition is supported by others—until about the beginning of the seventeenth century the Lepchas were entirely nomadic, only building temporary mud huts, and travelling about the forests, living on such animals they could kill, and the wild plants, of which the Lepchas have considerable know-
[824] ledge, for they know the edible (but not, as European tradition believes, the medicinal) properties of nearly every tree and plant. Iron for knives, Kahlyeu says, was introduced in the time of his father's grandfather, that is to say in the first half of the eighteenth

[551] [7] Some objection may be taken to my referring to married women as Mrs. X. Among the Lepchas married women are never named, and there are three different methods of referring to them: mother of A, wife of B, or woman from C, that order representing the frequency of usage. Thus Mrs. Tafoor is usually called Chimpet-mu (mother of Chimpet, her eldest son), less often Tafoor-veu (wife of Tafoor), or Panung-mu (woman from Panung). 'Mother of A' seems to me unnecessarily confusing, and since, in nine cases out of ten, a married woman owes her presence in the community to the fact that she is married to her husband, I have found it most convenient consistently to refer to married women as 'wife of X', or, in the English form 'Mrs. X', since this term seems to me to approach nearest to the cultural reality.

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173 century; about a generation later the Lepchas started living in permanent houses and were able to hold or increase their stock of domestic animals. Private property in land must have developed somewhat later; according to native tradition the land below the monastery—that is to say the more protected valley ground—has been divided into private property from time immemorial, but the higher ground was common property and was acquired and cleared as was wanted. At the time of Kahlyeu's father—that is to say about 1840—this ground too was divided up, and today all cultivatable ground is privately owned. Kahlyeu also said that until about 120 years ago only millet was cultivated, and not dry rice; but this seems to me improbable in view of the fact that the religious observances[8] are much more concerned with dry rice, than with millet or any other crop.

342 When new houses are made they are always built in the late autumn months, after the gathering of the harvest. This date is 777 dictated by two reasons; at no other period would people have sufficient leisure and other dates would be ill-omened. The intending builder gathers materials for some months beforehand. The site of a new house is decided by a number of metaphysical considerations.

[179] First of all there is a lamaist book called Sachet Zai Putta which contains general rules of a very minute nature, indicating what sites are lucky, and what unlucky. This book is said to have been composed by four Gods who gathered together at Gyakar (perhaps Benares) to compile rules so that people should know which sites are good and which bad, which fruitful and which barren, where children can be born, and where they cannot. The following is a small selection of these very detailed regulations:

'A good site is, if there is a mountain to the south and below a slope. It is good if there is a stream on either side of the slope and trees in front. It is good if there is an outcrop of rock to the east and a flat plain to the west and a water fall opposite. Roads from east and north are good, but those from south and west should be avoided as they are used by Deut *moong* (fever devil). If there is a tree to the north directly below the house it should never be cut down; if, however, there is one to the south directly above it, it should be cut, or; if it be too big to cut down, a knife or some other piece of iron should be stuck into it. If the earth on which the

[8] See Chapter Nine. It is probable that millet was historically the earlier crop: what I question is the date of the introduction of dry rice.

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house is built is soft the house-mother will die. It is bad if there is not a hill between the north and the east because you will get the wind.

'*Choten* and *Mani* ('Mani walls' and prayer flags) should never be placed to the east or the inhabitants of the house will die, they should be on the north and west. It is good if the hill behind be covered with trees. It is bad to have a red cliff behind to the south; people born in the year of the Horse or the year of the Snake will be particularly troubled. (This can be averted by elaborate ceremonies.)

'It is bad if there is standing water below the house which will reflect the light; if there is, gold, silver and copper should be put in the water. It is bad if water seeps through the ground below the house, above it does not matter. It is bad if there is a cave to the north or west; for that would be the home of Mamoo *moong* (a malevolent female devil). It is bad to be below a pass between two hills, with a land slip below you, this is a devil's road. It is bad if there is a juniper tree (*sanden koong*) to the west, . . . etc.'

When an intending builder has chosen a site which fulfils these general desiderata, he has still to find out whether that site will be propitious for him personally. To do this he digs up a small piece of earth from the intended site, concentrating fixedly all the time on the question of whether the ground is good-omened or not, and takes it to a competent lama[9] who will then consult the book *Tong-yoop* and cast a horoscope to see if the site is suitable in relation to the intending builder's horoscope, reckoned by the various year-cycles.[10] If the first site chosen is not propitious others must be looked for until a suitable one is found. It consequently follows that all other considerations are secondary; it is better to be near a stream (for water for domestic use and also in case of fire) and to have suitable ground near for a field-garden, and, if possible, to be near friends and relations; but the verdict of the lamas comes first.

When the site is finally determined upon the lama carefully replaces the sample of earth, and then offers *cherkem*—that is mixed grains floating in strained *chi*—which is thrown on to the ground

[9] In Lingthem only Tafoor and the two Dorjé Lapoon knew how to cast this horoscope; the Lharibu Chujen of Panung was the only lama in the neighbourhood to possess or be able to read Sachet Zai Putta.

[10] See Chapter Seven, pp. 209–212) and Appendix III.

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342 so as to gratify the devils which have taken up their abode in the neighbourhood so that they shall not trouble the work in progress. Then the four corner-posts and the centre post are set up, and the low stone walls, on which the house will rest, are built. The building should always start from the east. After the pillars and stone walls have been set up straight by an overseer the building proceeds without direction, the walls, flooring, ceiling, rafters and finally the thatch being built. When people know that [476] a house is being built or repaired they come to help spontaneously; they are given no pay or wages of any sort except a meal at the end of the day; but they know that they in their turn will receive help when they need it. Men, women and children all lend a hand at the various tasks; but women are considered incapable of handling the biggest pieces of timber.

Some time after its completion the house must be consecrated by lamas and Mun with the ceremony of *Tashi chéné*; ideally this should be performed as soon as the house is completed and repeated twice in subsequent years; but it is often not done immediately for the owner may not possess the ox and other necessary materials. When the first meal is eaten in the completed house some old and experienced man (not the house-owner himself, but it does not matter who else) must make a small hole in the roof immediately above the fireplace and throw out a live ember and some water; this is done so that the smoke may go out properly and not fill the house.

The ceremony of *Tashi chéné* is as follows. First of all incense leaves are burned to pacify the demons who live in the earth below the house and who may have inhabited the trees of which the house is [782] built. Then a live ox is dedicated by a Mun to all the gods, slaughtered and cut up; the head, right foreleg and left hind-leg [465] (these portions are called *ga-ʒook*) are given to the carpenters who have worked on the house as their fee. After this a lamaist ceremony, with music and readings from the appropriate books, is performed, at the end of which the chief lama present (if possible one of the Dorjé Lapoon)[11] will anoint the house-pillars with blood, *chi*, liquor and butter, starting with the western pillar and proceeding to

[11] Dorjé Lapoon is the title given to the oldest, wisest, and most revered lamas; it is not strictly translatable: dorjé is the sacred 'thunderbolt' which is part of the lama's sacred paraphernalia; lapoon means teacher. In works dealing with Tibet the title is usually translated as 'abbot', but this term seems to me inappropriate for non-resident dignitaries.

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the northern, eastern, southern and central. After the anointings the pillars are stamped with a large cone made out of ground rice, called *Gett'r tho-mu.* Finally all present throw rice mixed with flour at the pillars, shouting in as loud a voice as possible *Ta-shi shu.* This ceremony is meant to avert illness from the inhabitants of the house.

Tashi chéné is occasionally performed after major repairs. Thus while we were there Katel had the ceremony performed after a new floor had been put into his house (but he had omitted to have the ceremony done when the house was first built); and Jiroong, whose house had been gutted by fire, intended to perform the ceremony when he should have completed his repairs.

Minor repairs and alterations can be performed at any convenient time, and without any ceremony. The most frequent of such repairs is re-thatching, which needs doing at least once every seven years. The reeds used for thatching are collected about three months beforehand, bent while still green, and left to dry. The necessary bamboo supports are also collected and cut to the required length and creepers whose bark will be used for fastening the bamboos are fetched from the forest. (It is technically an offence to take these creepers without paying for them; and when Pembu's roof was being re-thatched the old man who was stripping the creepers sat isolated from the other workers so that they should not be cognisant of the crime being committed. The gesture was entirely symbolical, for the old man had chosen as a hiding place a piece of ground on the side of the main path leading to the house, so that he was the first thing seen by most people arriving to work.) When all the material has been collected the house-owner decides on a day for the re-thatching and informs all his friends and neighbours.

First of all the thatch and rotten bamboo are stripped off three sides of the house and burnt; the thatch on the east side is left till the rest is completed to serve as a shelter in case of rain. Then the bamboo cross-pieces are lashed into position and the reeds slung across them; the distance of the cross-pieces is so calculated that there is a triple layer of thatch. Finally the thatch may be kept in place by bamboos fastened above it, but this is not done in all houses.

For such a piece of work as this helpers arrive all through the day and set about doing whatever job they consider necessary at the moment, without consultation or instruction, and often without

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

The big fields, which are cleared by burning once every eight years, where the main crops of dry rice, buckwheat and millet are raised, are mostly above the level of the houses; so that it is by no means unusual for people to have fields three or more miles away from their houses, and three thousand feet higher up or lower down the mountain side. Consequently field-houses are built for those periods when there is heavy work to be done in the fields—either weeding, or chasing away predatory birds and beasts from the ripening crops, or harvesting. In the permanent cultivations down in the valley these field-houses are solidly built structures, consisting only of a single room but otherwise in all respects similar to the ordinary Lepcha house. In some cases they are permanently inhabited by one or two members of a household either for reasons of health or because they do not agree too well with the other members. These field-houses however are built at any time without any ceremony for the selection of the site or at any time in the course of construction; and they are not included in the house-tax. The field-houses in the temporary cultivations are very flimsy affairs chiefly made out of matting.

The extremely precipitous nature of the ground renders travelling extremely difficult for Europeans who are accustomed to levelled paths and who walk shod. The Lepchas, owing to long habit, are magnificent walkers and climbers, and can cover enormous distances without apparent fatigue or breathlessness. I found the descent to the river which I made one day to witness the repairing of the bamboo bridge—a descent of about three thousand feet in a mile and a half—and the return therefrom, almost exhausting; the Lepchas will make the same journey without discomfort two or three times a day. Their physical strength and agility is amazing; over paths, or rather tracks, where experienced mountaineers need to use both hands, the Lepchas will carry heavy loads on their backs. Indeed one day Chala Mandal, the head of the village, after he had been recounting semi-legendary, semi-historical stories of the past exploits of the Lepchas, said with a deprecating smile 'Nowadays all the Lepchas are good for is carrying loads.'

vi

Writers about Sikkim and Tibet who incidentally mention the Lepchas refer to them with surprising unanimity as 'animists'; and the references to devils' habitations in the desiderata for a house-

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

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MIKMAR AND CHIMPET PLAYING

583
584
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MIKMAR GOES OFF WITH THE *ASÉK* GIFTS TO SEE HIS NEWLY AFFIANCED BRIDE, WHOM HE DOESN'T KNOW

He is wearing his best clothes. With him are on the left Gongyop's son, with the pig on his back, and Kurma's nephew Takshyom holding a lantern, and with the copper bowl on his back; on the right Chinya, Mikmar's "paternal uncle" (really his second cousin once removed) and Chala Mandal, who is *bek-bu*. The wife lives two days' journey away. On the fence are reeds which have been bent when green drying for thatch.

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2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

instead of turning eventually into a god it transformed itself into an emanation of Subdok Mung, and as such has been troubling the Mandal ever since. The local Mun and Lamas have held a consultation, as a result of which it has been decided that certain ceremonies are necessary; but these will not be efficacious unless carried out by a particular Mun who lives in Gyatong. The Mandal sent three times for this man, but he always refused to come; and it was only after being offered a substantial present of *chi* that he at last consented to attend. We were invited to witness the ceremony. When we arrived most of the family was collected in the kitchen, where the old Mun was seated with the usual offerings in front of him; there were several heaps of grain, lumps of butter, and one or two lighted lamps, the whole arranged on a cloth and placed on top of a winnowing-fan. By his side was a bowl of *chi*, out of which he dipped with a piece of banana leaf while making his incantations. He started by asking the demons to accept what he was giving them and finished by asking the gods in general to bless the Mandal, and implored them particularly to give him a son. The actual words he used were somewhat more Rabelaisian than my bald description suggests, and caused much laughter. After about a quarter of an hour the "specialist" handed over to the local Mun, when the offering was taken outside the house and placed on top of a fence. Nearby was a tethered ox, which was later killed with a bow and arrow by Gongyop's son. This beast was being offered to the Subdok Mung as a substitute for the Mandal's life. We always enjoyed attending these ceremonies; for apart from their inherent interest we were invariably offered a portion of the sacrifice, a most welcome addition to our otherwise unvaried diet of stringy chicken.

The Mandal's house is equalled only by that of Tafoor, and has a very fine and elaborate altar-room, complete with gilded images, and the twelve volumes of the *Boom*, the shortened version of the Kangyur. Although the Mandal is not himself a Lama it is usual for all who can afford to do so

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

159 to have an altar-room, and also a set of books, to read which
342 Lamas are called in as necessary. I noticed that by means of
622 bamboo conduits water was made available inside the house,
[312 where it dripped into a huge copper vessel. This was the only
336] house in Lingtem which might be described as having "running water."

159 The Mandal was an only child, and when his father had
587 already handed over most of his work, he adopted another boy in order to have someone to work the fields. On the death of his father the Mandal handed his wife, of whom he was growing tired, over to this adopted brother; and then married again. The first wife died shortly after, whereupon the Mandal gave his brother the second; and himself married a third. The second wife, who died four years ago, did not care for this arrangement and soon returned to her own home, whereupon the adopted brother was presented with wife number three; and the Mandal married yet again.
[585] Since he and his brother were living in the same house no ceremony was performed when these cast-off women were handed on; but this would have been necessary had the two brothers been living in separate houses. The Mandal has an only daughter, and passionately desires to have a son. It is this, he says, that has led him into matrimony time after
[789] time; and he has not finished yet! The people saw he will never have a son, since in the time of his father a curse was laid on the family. This was done by an evil-minded Lama, who thought that if there were any more children they would claim the land adjacent to their house. This was the property of some people who had died without heirs, and it had not at that time been reallotted.

159 It is generally believed that the Mandal is not the son of his
[848] supposed father, who was impotent. Once, when the father was absent from home, his mother, anxious lest the family die out altogether, induced a certain man to come and visit her
159 daughter-in-law. The story is known to the whole of the
837 village, and is said to have been made public by Chala's own biological father. He appears to have been a man of

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER 8

Houses and House-building

342 THE ordinary Lepcha house is extremely simple and generally contains but two rooms, one of which is used as a kitchen. In appearance it does not differ, except in size, from the monastery, which I take to be the prototype of Sikkim domestic architecture.

174 346 It seems likely that in Tibet the original monasteries also served as forts, as is often still the case. In view of the unsettled state of that country there was need for the people to keep close together; so that instead of living in scattered houses they all lived together inside the forts. As conditions became more peaceful the need to live in close proximity to others became gradually less urgent, but when the people came to build their own houses it was natural that they should take the local fort or monastery as their model, since they had none other. I am not suggesting that this also happened in Sikkim; and the transition in Tibet had probably taken place long before the Lepchas took to living in permanent houses. Sikkim, however, has always been in [177] 341 close cultural contact with Tibet; and in no way is the influence of the latter country more marked than in the local style of architecture. The extremely wet climate of Sikkim has of course made certain modifications necessary. Of these the most striking is the wide overhanging roof, which often projects as much as fifteen feet in front of the walls. It is one of the most pleasing features of all Sikkim houses, and has the additional advantage of keeping the walls completely dry throughout the rainy season.

In Tibet, monasteries, and in fact most houses, are usually built with very thick walls: they are sometimes as much as ten feet thick at the base. It is improbable that such thickness

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

was ever necessary for purposes of defence; but in a country as dry and cold as Tibet, where internal heating is still unknown, they serve the purpose of keeping the occupants of houses warm. This feature, although quite unnecessary in the warmer climate of Sikkim, has been retained in most of the public buildings, but in private houses has given way to walls of bamboo lath and mud plaster, which give all the protection required.

The ordinary Lepcha cottage is generally raised about six feet above ground, and is supported by wooden pillars resting on stones. It is entered by means of a ladder, which usually takes the form of a roughly notched bamboo, the space beneath the house being occupied by the cattle.

The building of houses, like every other Lepcha activity, is hedged around with rules and restrictions. Not all of these are always regarded; but to pretend a complete indifference would be to lay oneself open to the machinations of the ubiquitous evil spirits.

When a man wishes to build a new house he first takes a little earth from the proposed site and gives it to a Lama, who will then divine whether the place is suitable or not. This he does, not by means of meditation, or any other form of concentration, but by referring to a book called *Sachet Zai Patar*. There was only one copy in Lingtem and its owner, when reading it out to us, was honest enough to own that although he had studied the book for years he still found some of the instructions quite incomprehensible. Here is the gist of them:

Jampay Yung, Kongshi Gyabo, Hishay Tugyel, and Shinji Tulgay Gyabo once gathered together in Gyakar, which, so the Hlaribu said, is probably Budh Gaya but may be Benares! But in any case, in Gyakar there are seven burning ghats. These four gods consulted together and they came to the conclusion that since men were building houses all over the place, and without any regard to the suitability of the sites, it was incumbent upon them to formulate some instructions.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

It is very important that the site of a house be selected with 342
care, because on this depends the luck of the family: some 361
sites, for instance, will ensure large families, others none at 777
all. A site which has a small meadow in front and a hill behind, something like an Alp, is very good, as the hill behind may be used as a retreat. It is good if such a hill has a stream on either side; and there should also be trees all round. The site should slope gradually from back to front: it should be level on the west; and an outcrop of rocks on the east is good. It is particularly lucky if there is a waterfall directly in front. Roads leading to the site from the east and north are good; but those from west and south are bad, since devils come from these directions. There should be no trees on either side of the house, but only below. I pointed out to the Hlaribu that this last condition was almost impossible in a thickly forested place like Lingtem; but he only smiled and went on reading. If there is a large tree below, and immediately opposite the centre of the house, care must be taken that in no circumstances is it ever cut down; but a large tree similarly placed above and behind the house must always be felled. If it is too big for this it will suffice if a piece of iron, an old knife for instance, is stuck into it and left. If the earth on which the house is built is very soft this is a sure indication that the owner's wife will not live long; but it appears that a site cannot be selected with this end in view! It is bad if there are no hills between the north and east, because these give shelter from fierce winter winds. The door of a house should always face "the coming up of the sun"; but when I asked why the house adjacent to the monastery had its door facing west the Hlaribu would only say that "it does not really matter, but is better if it faces east."

It is not a good thing to build a house immediately beneath a pass; or on a site with a landslip below it. This is not for the more obvious reasons that will immediately occur [778] to the reader, but because such spots are the favourite resting-places of devils. It is unlucky for those born in "snake" or "horse" years if there is a reddish cliff or hill

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

342 behind the house; but for those born in "chicken" or
361 "monkey" years a white cliff to the west of the site is good.
777 If, by any chance, a person of "snake" or "horse" year finds that he has inherited a house with a reddish cliff behind he
[783] need not refuse to occupy it. It will be perfectly all right if he gets a Lama to prepare nine pots of water, into each of which he must put, respectively, a few scrapings of gold, silver, turquoise, iron, and various other metals. These pots must be wrapped in red, blue, and yellow cloth, tied up with black thread, and built into a prayer-wall either by the owner of the house or someone specially deputed by him. It is considered bad to have water below the house which reflects the glare of the sun; but if this is unavoidable, then gold, silver, and copper must be thrown into the pool concerned. It is not good if water seeps up through the ground immediately below the site; but apparently of no consequence if this should happen above. Nor is it good if there is a cave between west and north, as this would undoubtedly house a *Mamu* devil. A house should never be built immediately opposite the entrance to a valley, nor opposite any sort of crack or cleft. This would be most unlucky and would cause a rift in the family occupying the house. Unless absolutely unavoidable, a site should not be selected that lies between two hills, since this would certainly cause the owner of the house to be attacked by special devils which would cause him to commit various offences against the Sikkim state!

[312] The quality of the land surrounding the site is of no importance; nor is the proximity of drinking water. It is nice to have friends and relations fairly near; but these are minor considerations and of no importance in the first instance. In a country which has some of the finest scenery in the world it appears odd to us that the view is never considered. Some houses have, indeed, an unparalleled view of the mountains; but when the sites were selected this was a matter that never even entered the builders' heads.

If a householder wishes to put up chortens or prayer-walls,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

these should never be placed to the east of the house or the occupants will die: whenever possible they should be placed to the north. Inside the house, water must be stored on the north side; the fire-place should be on the west; and the grinding-mill should always stand on the north. I should add, however, that I hardly ever saw this arrangement carried out in any of the houses I entered, and the old Hlaribu said that it did not really matter.

Assuming that a site has been selected which does not too greatly contravene the above instructions, the Lama will visit it and make offerings to any spirits who might be disturbed by reason of the turning of the earth, or by the cutting down of trees with which to build the house. At the same time the original handful of earth, which the builder first took to the Lama, must be returned to the exact spot from which it was taken. After this the four corner-posts are set up, and the house may be completed without further disturbance. All houses, even temporary field-huts, must be built with at least two posts; and in no circumstances should a house ever be built in exact alignment with another.

As soon as the house is completed Lamas will come and perform the *Li Tashi* ceremony, which consists in offering rice and flowers; but this I never saw. In addition to the *Li Tashi* performed when the house is finished, this ceremony should be carried out, if possible, annually for the first three years. It is entirely optional whether it is done or not when a new floor is put down; but many people have the ceremony performed once every year as a matter of course. This, however, depends upon their means, since the necessary Lamas have to be paid and fed. Apart from the reading of holy books by four or five Lamas, the principal part of the ceremony consists of smearing the house pillars with a mixture of ox-blood, spirit, and butter by the Mandal. For this purpose an ox is sacrificed the day before, and its flesh offered to the gods and devils of the land on which the house stands, and to any spirits that might be dwelling in the planks

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5
Nepal AK1

used in its construction. The Mandal goes first to the western pillar; then to the north, east, and south, and finishes up with the centre. As he does this a Lama takes a small *torma* from the altar and presses it against each of the pillars in turn. Following this, rice and flowers are thrown at each pillar, at the same time all present shouting: "*Tashi Shu.*" Later on, the carpenters are given the head and two limbs of the ox: this is their payment.

Strictly speaking, no one should sleep in a new house until after the *Li Tashi* has been carried out; but most people do not bother to observe this rule. Although it has nothing to do with the building of houses, it is of interest to note, in passing, that a man should never sleep directly beneath either of the two main cross-beams; this does not, however, apply to women.

When a building has been completed it is usual for the owner to give a feast to all the workers. On this occasion the kitchen fire will be lighted for the first time, and some old man, not necessarily the owner of the house, unless he is considered sufficiently aged, will climb up into the roof with a little fire and a pot of water and throw them out through the gable: this is to ensure that in future the smoke will go out of the house and not hang about inside. It may here be noted that all Lepcha houses are constructed with what is technically known as a saddle roof; that is, one having two gable ends, and in which the ridge is shorter than the distance between the ridge and the eaves. The eaves run round all four sides of the house, the thatch at the two ends being carried some distance inside the gables, which are otherwise left open for ventilation. The function of these open gables is not to keep the air inside the house fresh but to carry the smoke from the kitchen away. At night, however, when the fire has died down, they permit fresh air to enter the house; and it may well be that to this is partly due the Lepcha's apparent freedom from tuberculosis, to which most other Himalayan tribes are particularly susceptible. The Nepalis, for instance, are very prone to contract this disease,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5
Nepal AK1

and it is worth noting that their houses contain no such ventilation. They are, moreover, in the habit of stopping up every crevice and crack with rags or paper, and in addition sleep with their heads completely covered, neither of which does the Lepcha do. The Lepcha house, moreover, has a wooden floor, through the joints of which, since the house is raised off the ground, air can also enter. The Nepali house, on the contrary, is built flush with the ground and has a floor of rammed earth smeared over with a mixture of mud and cow-dung; this last for ceremonial cleanliness.

24th March:

We went this morning to watch a house being re-roofed. It belonged to Pemba, Pichi's Lama brother. When we arrived at about nine o'clock some twenty men, including a number of Lamas, were already putting on new rafters. Only two women were present: Pemba's wife and mother; but others will turn up later, to help in the actual thatching. No payment is made to the helpers; but in addition to being fed while they are working they are given a feast on the conclusion of the work.

Women started to arrive about ten o'clock, and at once started to light fires and prepare the gargantuan meal which seems to be the usual complement of such occasions. Everyone appeared to be completely sober (an unusual state of affairs); but as soon as the women arrived sex was, as usual, the chief topic of conversation. Whenever a woman came anywhere near she would invariably be greeted with some obscene remark, at which all the others would laugh. The greatest joke seemed to be to induce the girls to go up on to the roof, so that men working below could pass personal remarks on such parts of their anatomy as were visible. I must say, however, that the girls seemed ready to play. At one time Pemba's mother, a most efficient and able woman, told the workers to press the thatch well down. "You come up here and we'll press things down all right," somebody shouted. This remark, to which she took not the slightest exception,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

was greeted with much giggling laughter, which seems to be reserved exclusively for this type of joke.

I was told that there was no one in charge of the work, and certainly did not hear anyone giving any sort of order. In spite of this, however, there was no fuss or bother; everyone seemed to know exactly what to do.

The material for roofing this house had been gradually collected during the past three months. We noticed one old man sitting apart, about a hundred yards away up the hill. He was preparing the canes for making the ties. We wondered why he was all alone. "So as not to attract the notice of any government official who might pass this way," he said. This appeared a most unlikely contingency, unless he thought we were spies; but since cane is a forest product, and therefore the property of the State, it should not rightfully be used without permission. This prohibition also applies of course to firewood; but in that case appears to be disregarded.

The thatch, by means of two overlaps, is of three thicknesses. It is not fixed to the rafters but is roughly kept in place with a long stick tied right across it. It is made from a special kind of bamboo only found high up in the forest. This is cut into four-feet lengths, split, soaked in water, and bent double while still green. It is placed on the roof with the inner surface outside, so that the rain is carried off the roof by what is, to all intents and purposes, a series of open bamboo drains.

As soon as the rafters and cross-pieces had been prepared the women joined in the work, the heavy bundles of thatch being first carried up to the attic by men. Pemba's father took no part and spent most of his time repairing a hedge round the house, in which he was assisted by his youngest son. The whole roof had been stripped off before we arrived; but one small corner had been left, as protection in case the new roof was not completed by nightfall.

I noticed that a bullock's horn had been fastened over the door. This is known as *Gusung*, and is meant to frighten devils. There is no ceremony in connection with its use; but

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Typical Lepcha homestead.

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Sowing dry rice.

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Re-thatching a house.

[facing p. 172]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

House-building and general repairs are also carried out at these times. Cardamoms are perennial and are planted in March and April, being grown from cuttings. The plants bear in the third year, and are at their best in the fourth, fifth, and sixth years, after which they are rooted up. If raised from seed the plants take from seven to eight years to mature. The fields have to be constantly weeded, especially at flowering time, since the flowers are close to the ground. When the cardamoms are gathered the flowered stem is removed, but the leaves are left intact.

I do not know when cardamoms were introduced into Sikkim, but Hooker, a most observant traveller, and a botanist moreover, makes no mention of them. Their cultivation, however, is now of great economic importance all over the State; but this aspect of the subject will be dealt with later.

It is believed in Jongu that cardamoms were introduced from Nepal, although I understand that the plant is not cultivated in that country; and certainly I have never seen it in such parts of Eastern Nepal as I have visited.

Menstruating women may not go near the cardamom plants, especially when they are in flower; nor should anyone who has used strong-smelling soap approach them, for this is offensive to the flowers. For the same reason the cardamom fields should never be used as latrines. It may be noted that all over Nepal menstruation is intimately connected with certain kinds of cultivation. A woman in this state may not, for instance, approach pumpkins, chillies, cucumbers, or egg-plants, or they will rot away: if they have only reached the flowering stage they will not set. It is thought that the smell of menstrual blood causes the damage, and that no harm will ensue if the woman thoroughly washes her body before going near the plants. Apart from this no one should point a finger at ripening pumpkins or cucumbers: nor should one talk loudly in their presence, or they will certainly rot away.

All these ideas are known to the people of Lingtem, and may possibly have been introduced by Tempa, who lived

[i.e., during Oct., Nov. and Dec.--Analyst]

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Ongden, a bridegroom of fifty.

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Ongden's new wife (in the bottom left-hand corner, wearing a white bodice) arriving at his house for the wedding. Her attendants are just about to enter the house.

[facing p. 258]

7: Hooker D-5 (1849-1851) 1854
AK5 Lepcha AK5

generous disposition, keep the wallet of the Bijooa always full.

Such are some of the prominent features of this people, who inhabit the sub-Himalayas, between the Nepalese and Bhotan frontiers, at elevations of 3000 to 6000 feet. In their relations with us, they are conspicuous for their honesty, their power as carriers and mountaineers, and their skill as woodsmen; for they build a waterproof house with a thatch of banana leaves in the lower, or of bamboo in the elevated regions, and equip it with a table and bedsteads for three persons, in an hour, using no implement but their heavy knife. Kindness and good humour soon attach them to your person and service. A gloomy-tempered or morose master they avoid, an unkind one they flee. If they serve a good hills-man like themselves, they will follow him with alacrity, sleep on the cold, bleak mountain exposed to the pitiless rain, without a murmur, lay down the heavy burden to carry their master over a stream, or give him a helping hand up a rock or precipice—do anything, in short, but encounter a foe, for I believe the Lepcha to be a veritable coward.* It is well, perhaps, he is so: for if a race, numerically so weak, were to embroil itself by resenting the injuries of the warlike Ghorkas, or dark Bhotanese, the folly would soon lead to destruction.

Before leaving the Lepchas, it may be worth mentioning that the northern parts of the country, towards the Tibet frontier, are inhabited by Sikkim Bhoteeas † (or Kumpas),

* Yet, during the Ghorka war, they displayed many instances of courage: when so hard pressed, however, that there was little choice of evils.

† Bhote is the general name for Tibet (not Bhotan), and Kumpa is a large province, or district, in that country. The Bhotanese, natives of Bhotan, or of the Dhurma country, are called Dhurma people, in allusion to their spiritual chief, the Dhurma Rajah. They are a darker and more powerful race, rude, turbulent, and Tibetan in language and religion, with the worst features of those people exaggerated. The various races of Nepal are too numerous to be alluded

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5
Bhutan AK2

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13. A LEPCHA HOUSE OF SIKKIM

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14. A BHUTANESE HOUSE OF SIKKIM

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

231 These stalls for the cattle consist of a protecting roof
343 supported on a bamboo frame. On the sloping side there is a little platform about ½ a meter high, which is used as a rack and is enclosed with bamboo posts. Here the fodder is piled,—grass and the branches and leaves of certain trees and shrubs. Little huts are used as stalls for the goats. These are raised about one meter high on bamboo posts. A bamboo gangway over which the goats cross into the hut, leads to the door. For the poultry, there is a little hut raised on bamboo posts about two meters above the ground. The poultry get into the hut by walking over a post with notches cut into it. In this manner the goats and poultry are protected against the wild animals. Every farm has a few dogs of a wretched paria breed. Horses and donkeys are rare.

342 The house of the Rong tribesman differs from that of the Nepalese, Bhutanese and Tibetans. It is so built on the slope, that the back wall rests against a stone foundation. A little path runs between the rear wall and the mountain slope, and this leads to the door either directly or through a little stone stairway. In front of the wall in the direction of the slope, a terrace is levelled out and on this there are two or three rows of columns made of square-cut tree trunks which support a balcony of planks. Over this balcony are walls made of pannels which are either filled in with wooden boards or with bamboo slats which are smeared with a layer of mud. A few openings are left in the walls which serve as windows and these are closed with the aid of sliding boards. The construction of the roof is peculiar. It consists of three sections; one of these is the middle ridge roof and two gable roofs. While the ground plan of the house is square, the roof is oval. It is covered with a special variety of grass held in place with bamboo slats. On the outer side a gallery runs either all around the four walls or around one wall only. (Fig. 29-32).

353 The inside of the square house is divided into several
354 parts. The biggest room is the fireplace. The planks of the floor along the back wall are covered with a thick layer of clay and are set in an edging of clay. In the centre there are three stones on which the kettles are placed. In larger families there are two fire-

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

places made of five stones. The third stone in the middle is common to both and is long enough to support a kettle on each of its outer extremities. Since the stones are placed with a view to holding larger kettles little iron tripods with rings are placed between the stones so as to permit the use of little kettles. Wood is used for fuel. About 1 and ½ meter above the fire a bamboo framework shelf is suspended for holding the kitchen utensils, fuel and other articles. The fireplace stretches across the entire width of the house, as it is the chief work-room, dining-room and, at night, the dormitory. In addition to this there are other little rooms shut off by wooden partitions. Some of these have a roof made of bamboo slats. All types of belongings are stored up over this ceiling which can be approached by the help of a tree trunk notched at intervals to serve as stairs. Occasionally one finds an additional partition which serves as an altar on which sacrifices are offered. This is, very likely, a borrowing from Buddhism.

The pig sties are sometimes located under the house, sometimes at the side. Near the house are situated the stables for cattle and goats and the poultry cages, together with other store houses. The entire settlement in some cases is completely enclosed with a bamboo fence.

Individual farmhouses are as a rule all by themselves. But there are also settlements which comprise of two, three or four houses. This kind of dwelling, a kind of building on piles, is characteristic of the Rong, but has its parallels in South-East Asia and South China.

The ancient costume of the Rong consists of two coarse striped widths of cloth which are held in place over the shoulders by means of a clasp, and about the loins with the aid of a cloth girdle. It reaches up to the knees. Both men and women wear trousers which come below the knees. Sometimes the men wear a short shirt, while the women wear a bodice. This was the ancient costume and the material for this was woven by the Lepchas themselves. Today the practice of weaving has almost died out. The Lepchas purchase ready-made materials. In place of the old style the women have taken over the Tibetan style in an ever increasing degree ; the long dress without sleeves (the Tibetan

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

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29. Lepcha house

30. Lepcha house

[End Plate 11]

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

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31. Lepcha house with stores

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32. Fenced Lepcha settlement

[End Plate 12]

3: Bell G-5 (1904-21) 1928 AJ1 Tibet

Lepcha AKS

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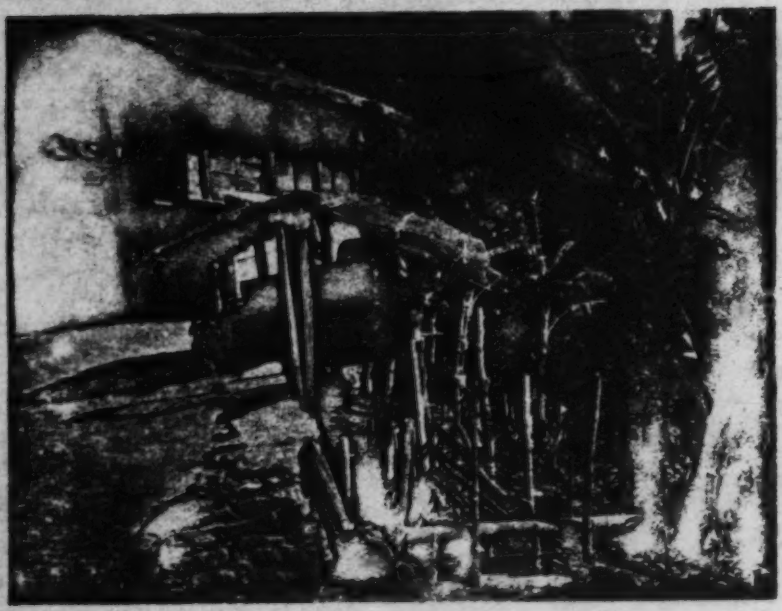

Lepcha house in a forest in Sikkim

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Facing P.6